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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON CAFTA, JANUARY 11, 2005

1. Editorial in San Pedro Sula-based liberal daily "La Prensa" on 1/11, entitled "CAFTA cannot wait" "Such an important issue as the ratification of CAFTA has been put off by Congress until after the primary elections of February 20. According to President Maduro, the textile maquila industry, the world's third biggest exporter to the U.S., would be the most affected if Congress keeps postponing the ratification of the agreement."

"Not everything people say about CAFTA is true, and some organizations oppose it because they probably haven't had a chance to become acquainted with all the provisions of the agreement. For instance, - to cite some advantages - while Honduras will be able export about 91% of its agricultural production to the U.S. free of tariffs, this nation will be able to undergo a progressive elimination of duties and tariffs for up to 20 years."

"CAFTA reaffirms our national sovereignty, guaranteeing that trade liberalization will not affect the environment or our workers' rights. Besides, it establishes strong anticorruption measures for public officials that ask or receive bribes and for companies that allow or offer them."

"CAFTA is a countdown that cannot wait. Either we introduce ourselves into the free market or we remain isolated from the world, enduring the failure of a captive, inefficient, speculative, and traditionally oppressive market."

Palmer